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DISSERTATION

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CONCERNING

PRIVATE JUDGMENT

AND

AUTHORITY.

By the AUTHOR *of the* Short Method with the Deists.

The THIRD EDITION Corrected.



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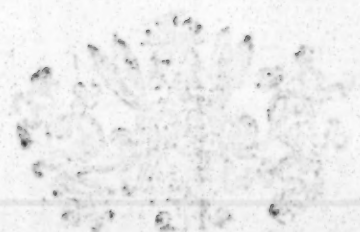
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M.DC.C.XXVI.

DISSEMINATION

PRIVATE DOCUMENT


AUTHORITY



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OF
PRIVATE JUDGMENT
AND
AUTHORITY
In MATTERS of
FAITH.

(I.)  ALL the Religions and all the Sects in the World are built upon the Dispute betwixt these two; whether Men are to govern themselves by their own *Private Judgment*, or to be determined by the Authority of others, in their Faith or Religion.

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(II.) The

(II.) The Effects of private Judgment are these, Multiplicity of Sects and Opinions; perpetual Wrangling, without any Umpire or Judge of Controversy; whence come inveterate Prejudices against each other, Animosities, Strifes, Envyings, and all the War of Religion; which the most of any one Thing embroils the Peace of the World, and is always the chief Pretence in the Civil Wars of Nations within themselves, and most commonly in the Wars of Kingdoms against Kingdoms. To remedy all which Evils, some think there is no other Method, but to have some settled Judge of Controversy, to whom Appeals may be made, and whose Determination should end all Disputes concerning Religion: And this not only as to the outward Peace of the Church, and consequently of the World; but even as to Mens inward Persuasion and Belief, especially in Matters of Faith; for how otherwise, say they, shall every private Person determine himself as to the Articles of Faith? The greatest Part of Mankind are ignorant, and must depend upon the Judgment of others; and what wild Work would it make, to leave every Man, Woman, and Child, to pick out their own Faith, either from the Strength of their own Reason, or from the Scriptures (suppose) amongst us? We should have as many Religions almost as Men, and as many different Faiths. And suppose the Scriptures to be an infallible and compleat
Rule

Rule of Faith, yet how shall we agree about the true Meaning and Interpretation of them? We see every Sect quote Scripture, and every one has his own Interpretation of it. This is endless, and utter Confusion. These are the Inconveniencies which attend leaving every Man to follow his own private Judgment.

(III.) But then, on the other Hand, there are likewise Difficulties in our submitting our private Judgment to Authority. First, because it is left to our private Judgment to chuse that Authority to which we ought to submit. How otherwise shall a Man determine himself, whether he should be a Christian, a Jew, a Mahometan, or an Heathen? For there is no Judge over all these. And this is the first, and the most material Step he can and must make in the Choice of his Religion. And if there is nothing to guide him herein (under God) but his own private Judgment; Why should not that (say others be likewise sufficient to guide him in the Disputes there are amongst the Sub-Divisions of each of these Religions? For if I must trust to my own private Judgement in the most material Point, why not in the lesser. Nay, the Belief of a God, which is the first and highest Point in all Religions, depends upon private Judgment, and not upon Authority. It would be Blasphemy to put it upon any human Authority, for that would set such Authority above God! If I believe *James* upon the Word of *John*, I must have a greater Confidence in *John* than

6 *Of Private Judgment*

than in *James*, in the Recommender than in the Person who is recommended by him. So it is if I should believe a God upon the Authority of any Church, it would certainly follow, that my Faith was more in that Church, than in God! And I have no more for the Authority of that Church, than the Judgment I pass upon the Arguments offered to convince me of it. So that all rests upon my own private Judgment still. And it is impossible I can be more sure of any Thing, than of the Certainty of my own Judgment. I cannot be surer of the Being of a God, than of the Truth of those Reasons which persuade me to believe it. And all the Reasons before given for submitting my private Judgment to Authority, suppose the Truth of my Judgment, and appeal to it; Why else does any persuade another? And private Judgment can never be so fatally mistaken, as in submitting to Authority, if it should judge wrong; because in all other Errors it may be set right again, by stronger Reasons being offered on the other Side; but if a Man once resigns his Reason, and give it up absolutely to Authority, there are no Means left to retrieve him, if he has judged amiss in the Choice of such a Guide, whom he thinks to be infalible; he must then follow his Guide, though in all the wild Delusions that are possible; for he must examine no more; his Principle is, to go on blind-fold: He has plucked out his Eyes, that he may see the better!

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And the Question will now remain, whether greater Mischiefs and Inconveniencies have befallen Mankind in the one Way or in the other; in following their private Judgment, or in submitting implicitly to Authority? And we may argue this Case; for let any Man talk what he will, and think never so much that he has abandoned his private Judgment, yet it is not in his Power, while he remains a Man; it is inseparable from human Nature, and cannot be utterly extinguished; though some have so defaced it, that it is hardly visible.

But if in this Enquiry it should be found that greater Mischiefs have attended private Judgment and Authority, yet would that be no greater Argument against private Judgment, than it would be against Free-Will, or any other Composition of our Nature, if the Mischiefs it occasions were more than the Good. We cannot alter our Nature, it must be as it is. Perhaps Men make use of their Hands to more Destruction in Wars, Murders, Robberies, Thefts, &c. than any Good they do with them: Yet this would be an ill Argument for cutting off the Hands of our Children as soon as they were born. And it would be worse to divest Men of their Understanding, because their private Judgment might mislead them.

1. But however let us go on to the Comparison. The Christians will easily allow all the Heathens as misled by Authority, for they

8 *Of Private Judgment*

go on in the Track of their Fathers, without Examination of the Grounds or Reasons of their Religion. But they have no Notion of an infallible Judge, and therefore were more easily converted, and now make the great Body of Christians.

2. But the *Jews* stood out at first, and still continue in their Infidelity, upon the single Point of Authority, because *Christ* was rejected by their Church. And it is the same Point of the Authority of the Church which rivets the Church of *Rome* in all her Errors, and makes any Reformation impossible. And indeed I see not how a *Jew* can be converted upon this Principle, which is common to them and the Church of *Rome*. But this will appear more plainly by hearing each of them defend himself. And in this Conversation which I now introduce, I will bring in a *Church of England-Man*, to shew what that true Authority is, which God has delegated to his Church; for, no Doubt, She has an Authority, and a great one; and then a Dissenter shall argue for private Judgment against that Authority; and this will put the Matter in as clear a Light as any Way I can contrive. To begin then:

(IV.) *JEW*. Do not you of the Church of *Rome* lay down this as a Foundation-Principle, that it is inconsistent with the Goodness of God to leave Men without a sufficient Guide
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in Matters of Faith ; and not to preserve that Guide from misleading us, to the Ruin of our Souls?

ROM. CA. Yes, this is our Principle, as I suppose it is yours.

JEW. It is ours too. And that this Guide is the Church. And therefore we reject your *Messiah*, because the Church did reject him. And ours was indisputably the only Church of God then in the World ; whereas other Christian Churches dispute this Point with the Church of *Rome*.

ROM. CA. There was but one *Christian Church* from the Beginning of the World, under divers Dispensations. Yours was one of these ; which ended when the *Messiah* came, the Church was then in him, and removed from the Synagogue.

JEW. Did God then forsake his Church, and chuse another ? But you say, That *Christ* is not the Church, but came to redeem the Church ; he did not come to redeem himself. You call the Church his Body. Then he had no such Body when he came at first, unless it were our Church. And he owned ours to be the Church all his Life-time. And commanded his Disciples to be obedient to her, as * *Sitting in Moses Seat*. And she was owned as such by his † *Apostles*. But how did he prove himself to be the *Messiah*.

ROM.

* Matt. xxiii. 2, 3.

† Acts iv. 8. xxiii. 5.

10 *Of Private Judgment*

ROM. CA. He proved it evidently by his Miracles, by his heavenly Doctrine, and by the Prophecies of him in your own Scriptures.

JEW. But the Church determined against him in all these, and said, That he wrought his Miracles by *Beelzebub*: That he was a Deceiver in his Doctrine: And that he was not the *Messiah* of whom the Scriptures spoke. Now, SIR, pray tell me, who is the proper Interpreter of Scripture? Is it the Church, or is it left to every Man's private Judgment? And take this along with you, That no *Jew* turned Christian, but he who preferred his own private Judgment to the Authority of the Church: But all who adhered to the Church as their infallible Guide, and left the Interpretation of Scripture to her, did reject your *Christ*, as we all do to this Day.

And we build upon the Promises of God made to his Church, to our Church; That the *Lips of the priests should preserve knowledge, and that we should seek the law at his mouth, for that he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts* *.

† *And as for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord, my spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth*

* Mal. ii. 7.

† Isa. lix. 21.

mouth of thy seeds seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.

And this Method of hearkening to the Church, is called *the way of Holiness*, and a *High-Way* for Plainness, that * *the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein.* And we have many other Texts to the same Purpose.

ROM. CA. These were meant of the Christian Church which was to come.

JEW. But they were made to our Church. And if they did not belong to our Church, then we have been misled all this while, and we have had no Guide of Controversy; and so the Goodness of God has failed, which you as well as we own is obliged not to leave Men without such a Guide.

ROM. CA. If you had hearkened to your own Prophets, they would infallibly have led you to our *Christ*, for they spoke of him.

JEW. This is still the Question, whether your *Christ* was the *Messiah* or not? And let me ask you. Are we not obliged to take the Judgment of the present Church in every Age? Or may any Man in his private Judgment depart from the Decision of the Church under which he lives, and appeal to the Church in primitive Times? Has not the Church in one Age as much Authority as in former Ages? Is not her Commission perpetual? Therefore the Church in Being, at that Time, when your
Christ

* If. xxxv. 8.

12 *Of Private Judgment*

Christ came, was the only Judge then to which all ought to have Recourse, and by whose Judgment they ought to abide; and she was then the only authentick Interpreter of Scriptures.

The Promises of Perpetuity, Infallibility, &c, were made to us *Jews*; you *Gentiles* were not then concerned. And will you not give us leave to understand our own Law best, wherein we were born and bred, and which we received from our Fathers, who were perpetually conversant in it, and made it their Study Day and Night? Yet you now would exclude us, and tell us you understand our Law better than ourselves; and that it meant You all that while, and you quote it on your Side. But if it did ultimately refer to You, yet surely that was not so literally and primarily as to us who were named, and were first in Possession of it. If it did descend from us to you, yet we must not be overlooked. And if these Promises were not made good to us, you can have no Title to them, who only inherit them after us. Can the Child inherit more than what his Father left him? And if the elder Brother was dispossessed, to make room for the younger, as you love to speak, yet the younger does but succeed to what the elder had before. Therefore these Promises which were made to us the elder Brother, cannot belong to you the younger, unless they did first belong to us. Otherwise they

they did belong to none at all when they were made, not for many Ages after.

(V.) CHURCH of ENGLAND-MAN. You are both upon one Bottom, the Authority of the Church; and both cannot be right. But the *Jew* has the Advantage in this, That you both allow his Church to have been the only true Church in the World, for many Ages together; whereas the *Jew* does not allow the Church of *Rome* ever to have been any true Church, or that Salvation is to be had in her.

ROM. CA. This is to retort the Argument we use against you of the Church of *England*, That you own yours to have been a true and orthodox Church; and then we ask, When did she fail? But we say, the Church can never fail; and that Salvation is only to be had with us.

CH. ENG. I did indeed bring it in for this Purpose, to shew you the Fallacy of that popular Argument by which you gain Profelytes among the vulgar Sort, *viz.* The Church of *England* allows Salvation may be had in the Church of *Rome*; but the Church of *Rome* denies Salvation may be had in the Church of *England*; therefore it is safer by Confession on both Sides, to be of the Church of *Rome* than of the Church of *England*. This I have heard often urged, and it seems to carry a great deal in it, at first Sight, with the unthinking People. But when they see that all
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14 *Of Private Judgment*

the Force in it strikes equally against Christianity in Favour of Judaism, I hope it will make them consider and examine into the Bottom of this Pretence, which is grounded upon the same Error that misled the *Jews*, viz. The *Absolute and Indefeasible Authority of the Church*, in Opposition to *private Judgment*.

DISSENTER. I have now a fair Field opened to me, against you of the Church of *England*; for we set up our own private Judgment against the Authority of your Church.

CH. ENG. You shall be heard in your Place. But the *Roman Catholick* has not yet done with what I know he has to alledge.

(VI.) ROM. CA. No, I have not. For since my Argument is now with you, I have more to urge than I could against the *Jew*, which is, the Proofs out of the New-Testament for the Infallibility and Perpetuity of our Church, such as * *Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it—Tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* And, † *When the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you unto all truth.* And there are other Texts which you know we urge to this Purpose.

CH. ENG. But not one of them that names the Church of *Rome*. And here you know is our Dispute. You call yourselves the *Catholick*

* Matth. xvi. 18. xviii. 17.

† John xvi. 13.

tholick Church, and confine whole Christianity within the Communion of the Pope of *Rome*, as the Principal of Unity, and Head of all. And yet there is not one Word in the Scripture of either the Pope or Church of *Rome*. So that this must be determined purely by private Judgment. And this is your whole Foundation, as you stand distinguished from us and other Christian Churches. And if private Judgment is to be determined by Vote, there are ten to one against the Church of *Rome* upon this Point. And that not only of those who have broke off from her since the Reformation; but the *Greek* Church, and other numerous Churches in *Asia*, and *Africa*, did never own the Supremacy of *Rome*, nor do to this Day. And these, without the Reformation, will far out-number not only what can be properly called the Church of *Rome* now at this Time, but in the largest Extent that ever she was, even before the Reformation.

(VII.) ROM. CA. But the Church of *Rome* is the *Mother-Church*.

CH. ENG. How can she be the Mother of those Churches which never descended from her? There were Churches of the *Gentiles* before there was any at *Rome*. * *The disciples were called christians first in Antioch*. But it is certain that the *Jewish Christian Church* was the Mother of all other Christian Churches. And so *Christ* † did ordain, That the Gospel should

* Acts xi. 26.

† Luke xxiv. 47.

16 Of Private Judgment

should be preached among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And the Apostles* went about, *Preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.* And thus it continued till the Vision of the Sheet to St Peter, *Acts x.* for they did not know before, that the *Gentiles* were to be made Partakers of the Gospel. Therefore all the Promises of *Christ* which you have named were made to this First and *Mother-Christian-Church* of the *Jews*; and she was in Possession of them, before there was one Christian in *Rome*, or any where among the *Gentiles*.

ROM. CA. But *Rome* is become the *Mother-Church* since.

CH. ENG. Not to half, as I have shewed above. But if the *Mother-Church*, and the Promises made to it can be transferred from one Church to another, then it may be transferred from *Rome*, as it was from *Jerusalem*, and so without End. And to what particular Church will you then fix these Promises of Perpetuity, &c? You must come to us, who believe that *Christ* will always have a Church upon Earth; and that the Gates of Hell shall not finally prevail against his Church in general; but that there is no Promise to secure any particular Church, that her Candlestick may not be removed, as others have been.

ROM. CA. But what Church was that of which *Christ* spoke when he said, *Tell it unto the Church, &c.*

CH. ENG.

* *Acts xi. 19.*

CH. ENG. It was every particular Church. For the Case there put is of private Difference betwixt Man and Man, *If thy Brother trespass against thee* — There *Christ* directs first private Admonition, then the Intervention of Friends, but if that would not do, then *Tell it to the Church*, that is, to the Church or Congregation of which you are both Members. It is impossible to bring every private Quarrel before the Catholick Church. There was nothing at all of the Faith concerned in this Case. Nor in the xvii. of *Deut.* (often quoted by you for the infallible Judgment of the Church) the Case there put is only about Civil Causes, as you may see *ver. 8.* And the Civil Judge is joined with the Priests in this. But neither *God* nor *Christ* does any where send us to a Judge of Faith. There cannot be any Judge of Faith but *God* alone.

(VIII.) ROM. CA. Why do you say there cannot? No doubt there may be such a Judge, whether there is or not.

CH. ENG. The best Way is to put it to a Tryal. Let us begin then with the Creed, the first Article is, *I believe in God the Father Almighty.* Now I ask, who is the Judge of this Article? Who is Judge whether there is a *God* or not; And so of the Rest. Whether there is a *Christ*? Whether he *died, rose, &c.*? Whether there is a *Holy Ghost*? Whether there will be a *Resurrection* of the *Dead*, and a *Life Eternal*?

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ROM.

ROM. CA. This is an odd Way of turning the Question. There is no such Judge of these Things, as that we were not to believe there is a *God*, or *Christ*, &c. if such Judge should so determine.

CH. ENG. Then there is no Judge of Faith. And now I will give you the Reason why there cannot be such a Judge among Men. Because where any Thing is determined by Authority, such Authority must be Superior to what it determines. As in Civil Causes, the Authority of the King by whose Commission they are determined, is superior to the Right or Property of the Subject. And for the same Reason, if I should believe a *God*, or a *Christ*, &c. upon any Authority whatsoever, that Authority with me must be prior and superior to what I believe upon that Authority. And thus the Church (supposing it such a Judge of Faith) would have an Authority above *God*, or *Christ*, or any Thing contained in the Creed. And therefore I think it is plain, that we receive not the Creed upon the Authority of the Church.

(IX.) ROM. CA. You had never had the Creed but by the Church.

CH. ENG. That may be. The Church taught it me, propos'd it to me, and convinced me of the Truth of it. But not by Way of Authority; for I could not believe the Authority of the Church, till I was first convinced by the Scriptures that *Christ* had established

established such a Church, and vested her with such Authority. So that I receive the Scriptures upon the Testimony, not Authority of the Church; and I examine that Testimony, as I do other Facts, till I have satisfy'd my private Judgment there is no other Way. As suppose an Atheist to be convinced by me of the Being of a *God*, he then believes it, and I may be said to be an Instrument in this. But how foolish would it be in me, nay blasphemous, to assume Authority over him for this, and say, That it was by my Authority he believed a *God*, and therefore that he was obliged to believe every Thing else I told him, without examining; because if my Authority was taken for the Being of *God*, then nothing surely of lesser Consequence could be excepted from it. This is the Manner of Argumentation for receiving the Faith from the Authority of the Church. This is that Circle from which you can never rid yourselves, of believing the Scriptures upon the Authority of the Church; and then back again, of believing the Church upon the Authority of the Scriptures. This makes each of them of greater Authority than the other, and each of them of lesser!

And now tell me, if I have nothing but my private Judgment for the Being of a *God*, shall the Church pretend to an Authority over private Judgment; and that I shall not be allowed to make use of it in any Thing she proposes to me!

(X.) ROM. CA. In smaller Things you may, which we call Matters of Opinion, but not in Matters of Faith, for then, *who shall be Judge?*

CH. ENG. I think the Reverse of this to be the Truth, *viz.* That this Question, *who shall be Judge?* And the submitting of our private Judgment, is only in smaller Matters, and of little Consequence. As in temporal Affairs, and Disputes of *meum* and *tuum*; and in determining Rites and Ceremonies in the Church, which are not of the Essentials of Religion, and in Matters of Discipline for the better Government of the Church; in these Things we ought to submit our private Judgement, and if there be a Dispute about them, it is very proper to ask, *who shall be Judge?* Because the Contest and Breach of Unity in the Church is of far more Importance than any of these Things, let them be determined which Way it will. But in Matters of Faith it is quite otherwise, and there to ask, *who shall be Judge?* Is most abhorrent, as *who shall be Judge*, whether there is a God or not, or a Christ? And so of other Articles of the Creed, as I have shewed you before.

God has subjected our Lives and Fortunes to the absolute Disposal of Civil Government, because these are no great Things, and we must give them up however. And in these there is a Necessity of determining the Question, *who shall be Judge?* Without this, there
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can be no End of Civil Disputes, and Government would be impracticable; there must be a last Resort from which there is no Appeal; otherwise there would be an eternal running round, or a *Progressus in infinitum*, and no Contest about Civil Affairs could ever be determined. And there is no Security in this, that an unjust Judgment will not be given at last; nor is that of great Moment, for, as I said, we are not much hurt by it.

But *God* has taken more Care of our Souls, and not put our Faith under the absolute Dominion of any. The Apostles disclaimed it, and when they exhorted and instructed, they said, * *Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy.* And again, † *If we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel, let him be anathema, that is, accursed.* And this was to be known only by private Judgement; and is a very positive Decision for it, against Authority, of the highest Sort possible next under *God* himself.

It is this mistaken Notion of Authority which detains you of the Church of *Rome*, and shuts your Ears from hearkening to Reason. You stop us every Turn with the Authority of the Church! Nay, you bid us deny our Reason, and our Senses too, in Obedience to the Church!

And it is this very same Mistake which hardened the Jews against *Christ*, as they said to

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those

* 2 Cor. i. 24.

† Gal. i. 8.

22 *Of Private Judgment*

those who were charmed with his Doctrine, and had seen his Miracles, and told them, * *Never man spake like this man*, but the chief priests, &c. answered, *Have any of the rulers or of the pharisees believed on him, but this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.* Here was a full Stop to all further Enquiries concerning him, whether he were the true *Messiah* or not? They must learn this from the Church, and not trust to their private Judgment, let the Case be never so plain!

(XI.) And I cannot here but observe a wonderful Providence in the Oeconomy of God, He might, no doubt, have so dispos'd Things if he pleased, as that *Christ* should have been received by his own, and acknowledged by the Church. But he chose the Way, wherein the Husbandmen should kill the Heir, and the Builders reject the Corner-Stone, that the Pride of Man might be humbled, and our Faith stand in God alone. *Christ* was denied and persecuted by all the Powers on Earth, as well Ecclesiastical as Civil. And of his own Apostles, one betrayed him, another forswore him, and forsook him. † *He trode the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with him.* And this was prophesied of before, That he should be a ‡ *Stone of stumbling* and a *Rock of Offence* to both the Houses of *Israel*; and that their Eyes should be blinded,

* Joh. vii. 48, 49. † Isa. lxiii. 3. ‡ Isa. viii. 14.

ded, that they should not know him when he came. As I have shewed before in the *Truth of Christianity demonstrated*, p. 105, 106. And what was it blinded them against this full and clear Evidence, but their Notion of the Authority of the Church! And was it not to beat down and for ever silence this Pretence, that *Christ* would not suffer the Church to give Attestation to him, nor come by their Recommendation? Should the Sun borrow Light from the Moon? Yet this Pretence is taken up again by the Church of *Rome*. It never was maintained by any but by the Church of the *Jews*, and of *Rome*! And we have seen strange Effects of both!

(XII.) ROM. CA. After all you have said, How do you know the canonical Book of Scriptures, but by the Authority of the Church?

CH. ENG. Not at all by her Authority, but by her Evidence. There is a great Difference, I pray you to consider it. There were false Gospels and false Epistles inscribed to several of the Apostles, set up by the Hereticks in the first Age; and they were detected in that same Age, while the Originals of what the Apostles wrote were still in Being. But the Hereticks could not produce the Originals of theirs, nor did their Copies agree with one another, as * *Eusebius* tells us. And this was not deciding the Matter by Authority, but

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by

* *Euseb. Hist.* l. v. c. 28.

24 *Of Private Judgment*

by plain Evidence of a Fact, as of any other Forgery, or supposititious Writing.

But you state the Matter so, as if there were a Heap of Papers, of many hundred Years past; some genuine and some spurious, all confusedly thrown together, and that it were left to the Church to distinguish these, by her Authority; and that we were obliged so to receive them, without knowing any more of the Matter; and had nothing but her Authority to trust to. But this, SIR, is far from being the Case. The Canon of the Scripture was settled at the Time when it could be done by full Evidence, and the Notoriety of the Thing was known to all. And we have received it down from that Time, in Copies so universally spread through the Christian World, that it is impossible to add or detract from it, without a general Detection of the Forgery by all Churches. And this has preserved the Canon of the New Testament so intire, that there is no Difference about it between you and us, or any other Christian Church.

It is true indeed we differ with you as to the Canon of the Old Testament. But we have the *Jews* on our Side for this, who never received those Books we call Apocryphal into their Canon. They were not wrote in their Language, at least most of them. And I might bring in the *Jew* again to reason the Case with you, how you came to understand their Canon better than themselves, who were
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in Possession of it many hundred Years before Christianity, and were so careful as to number the very Letters? But I will not prolong this, nor enter into the particular Disputes betwixt your Church and ours; my Business now being only to consider the Foundation-principle of the Authority of the Church, upon which all the rest depend. I will only say this further as to these Apocryphal Books, That St. *Jerom*, in his *Prologus Galeatus*, printed before all your *Vulgär Latin Bibles* that I have seen, excludes all these by Name out of the Canon, and says the Church did so too. And we may suppose that so learned a Father, who had himself translated the Scriptures, knew what the Church received in his Time. And it seems strange to me, that such a flagrant Testimony against you should stand in the Front of your own Bibles. But if you would have further Satisfaction as to this Point, I refer you to Bishop *Cosin's* elaborate *History of the Canon of the Scriptures*, which has not been answered by any of your Church, that I hear of; for it seems to carry Demonstration along with it, proceeding wholly upon Fact, and giving Vouchers in abundance. And as to the Books themselves, let any one read the Conclusion of the Book of *Maccabees*, 2 *Mac.* xv. 39, 40, and see if he can persuade himself that such Words should come out of the Mouth of God!

26 Of Private Judgment

(XIII.) But to return. The great Cause I conceive of the Church of the *Jews*, and the Church of *Rome*, having fallen into this Mistake of their own *Absolute and Unlimited Authority, and indefeasible Perpetuity*, is their not rightly apprehending the Nature of the Promises which *God* makes to Man. For, though they may be full and unconditional, as expressed in the Words, yet they are to be understood with an implied Condition of our Obedience. And we are not to think that he is bound by his Promise, though we are never so wicked! No. *God* will not thus be mock'd! If he has spoken * concerning a *Land* to *pluck up* and to *destroy*, if they *repent*, he will also *repent* of the *Evil*. And if he has *promised* to *build* and to *plant*, if they do *Evil*, he will *repent* of the *Good*. See what he said to *Eli* the High-priest † for his not restraining his Sons, who were wicked in their Ministry, *Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed, that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.*

God had promised to the Children of *Israel*, whom he brought out of *Egypt*, to carry them into the Land of *Canaan* to possess it. But, upon their murmuring, he condemned them all (except two) to die in the Wilderness, and said,

* Jer. xviii. 7, &c.

† 1 Sam. ii. 30.

said, * *Ye shall know my breach of promise ; in the Margin it is, the altering of my purpose.*

Obey my voice (says God †) that I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers.

It would be tedious to go through the Multitude of Texts to this Purpose. Many Promises were made to the People of *Israel* and to the Temple, of Perpetuity for ever. Yet both it and they were destroyed for their Wickedness. All which will not yet persuade them that these Promises were conditional. This was the hardest Point to gain upon them. *John the Baptist* began with this, to shew them the Vanity of their Hopes, in saying, *We have Abraham to our Father.* And this was what our blessed *Saviour* set forth to them in the Parable of the Vineyard and the wicked Husbandmen. But they would not understand. They still stuck to their own, being the only *Peculium* of God. They could bear nothing against this. When our Lord told them || of God's shewing to some of the *Gentiles* more Favour than the *Israelites*, in the Instances of *Naaman* the Syrian, and the Widow of *Sarepta*, they were filled with *Wrath*, and thrust him out out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill, that they might cast him down headlong. They heard *St. Paul* with Attention ‡ unto this Word, of his being sent to the *Gentiles*, and then they *Lift up their voices,*

* Numb. xiv. 34.
|| Luke iv. 25, &c.

† Jer. x. 4, 5.
‡ Acts xxii. 21, &c.

28 *Of Private Judgment*

voices, and said, *Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live; and they cried out, and cast off their cloaths, and threw dust into the air.* Such Transports have I seen among some of your Communion, when their Title to be the only *Peculium* was questioned! And yet you have less Pretence than the Church of the *Jews*; for there were many Promises made to them by Name, but not one to the Church of *Rome* by Name, nor by any Implication which does not depend upon great Uncertainties at best, and must be resolved wholly by private Judgment at last.

(XIV.) **DISSENTER.** It is now Time for me to come in. I stand upon private Judgment. And if you condemn me, you condemn that too.

CH. ENG. No doubt, private Judgment is often mistaken. Therefore you must take Pains to have your Judgment rightly informed.

DISS. Do you inform me then. You have run down the Authority of the Church. I see no Authority you have left her.

CH. ENG. Because I do not allow her an *Absolute, Unconditional, and Infallible Authority*, and that in Matters of Faith; you think she has no Authority at all.

DISS. Your 20th Article (of late so much contested) says, she has *Authority in Controversies of Faith*.

CH.

CH. ENG. Yes, but far from infallible. You see how it is there limitted, not to be repugnant to Holy Scripture, &c. She has Authority as a Witnels and Keeper of Holy Writ, as the Article words it.

DISS. What Authority is that ?

CH. ENG. The same that is acknowledged in your *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chap. xxxi. *Ministerially to determine Controversies of Faith*, as you there word it. But in regulating the Worship of God, and in Discipline for the better Government of the Church, there to determine authoritatively. And this is perfectly agreeable to our 20th Article, against which you have wrangled perpetually, and, of late, have called in the Deists to your Aid, at least accepted of their Assistance, in their *Priest-Craft in Perfection* against this 20th Article. For their Information therefore, and by your own Confession, the Authority of the Church stands thus; to determine *Controversies of Faith* only *Ministerially*, as the ordinary Dispensers of the Word, as *Servants of Christ*, and *Ministers of the Gospel*; not *Absolutely* and *Authoritatively*, as *Lords of our Faith*, and *infallible Interpreters of Scripture*. And it is most reasonable to submit and acquiesce in such Determination of the Church, except where the Case is notorious, and out of Doubt, and of the last Consequence, as of the Case of the *Messiah* when he came. For *unconditional Obedience*, in Matters of Faith, is due to none but

but God, nor has he delegated any such Power to Men. Will it therefore follow, That he has given no Power at all to his Church?

It was a great Power given when he said, * *Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them; &c.* And he left Power with them to invest others with the same Authority, without which none can preach the Faith; for † *How shall they preach, except they be sent?* And this is an Authority relating to Faith. As likewise the Power of the Keys, which implies all Authority of Government, as being the *Pillar and Ground of the Faith* ‡. And Christ has promised to ratify in Heaven the Censures of the Church, when justly inflicted upon Earth.

ROM. CA. Why do you limit the Text? The Words are general, || *Whatsoever ye shall bind, &c.* And, § *Whosoever sins ye remit, &c.*

CH. ENG. This is what I just now told you of, That you will take the Words of God without any implied Condition. Yet you yourselves cannot deny but that there are Conditions here implied, as of Contrition in the Penitent, &c. And if the Censures of the Church are inflicted *clave errante*, as you term it; that is, not justly, you say not that such Sentence will be ratified in Heaven.

(XV.)

* Matth. xxviii. 19.

† 1 Tim. iii. 15.

§ John xx. 23.

† Rom x. 15.

|| Matth. xviii. 18.

(XV.) ROM. CA. *Christ* said, * *The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses seat, all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.* What Exception do you here find from this *Absolute Authority* recognized by *Christ* to be in the Church?

CH. ENG. By this you own the Church then to have been in the Synagogue of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*. And, Were they infallible? Were all the *Jews* who had believed in *Christ* obliged to renounce him, because so commanded by these *Scribes* and *Pharisees*? But, SIR, there is not a Word of believing in all this Text. They were only to observe and do what the Synagogue should bid them. And no doubt the Condition was implied, of such Commands being lawful, and agreeable to the Word of *God*. And this is the Full of what is meant in our Obedience to any Church or Authority upon Earth. And being worded here to the utmost Extent, shews how the like Expressions are to be understood when applied to others. This is beyond, *Feed my sheep*, or *Tell it to the Church*; how then shall so much be inferred from *these*, when far less is meant in the more positive and comprehensive Word? It is said, *Children obey your parents in all things*. And if this had been said of our Obedience to the Church, it could have meant no more than as it stands in Relation to Parents,

* Matth. xxiii. 2, 3.

32 *Of Private Judgment*

rents, *viz.* in all their lawful Commands. And private Judgment must determine that, in the one Case as well as in the other.

But since you bring this Text to shew the Authority of your Church, you shall have it; and take it all together, in what *Christ* says of these same *Scribes* and *Pharisees*. In the same Discourse, where he commands this Obedience to be payed them, he calls them *blind Guides*, leading the *Blind* into the *Ditch*. He bids his Disciples * *beware* of their *Doctrine*; and charges them † with having made the Commandments of *God* of none Effect through their Traditions, and *many such like things which they did*, before his coming into the World.

Now if your Plea should hold, of the Church being transferred to the *Messiah* at his coming; yet you will be obliged to maintain the Infallibility of the *Jewish* Church before that Time. Else your Principle falls of the Goodness of *God* being engaged to afford Men always an infallible Guide: And likewise your Argument, from the Promises made to the Church of the *Jews* in the Old Testament, of Infallibility, Perpetuity, &c. which you quote now for your own Church. You have brought a very hard Task upon yourselves, either to maintain the Infallibility of the *Jewish* Church all along before *Christ* came, or else to lose your own. You must
answer

* Matth. xvi. 12.

† Mark vii. 13.

answer what I have quoted, of the *Jews* having *Rejected the Commandments of God, that they might keep their own Tradition.* And consider that it takes a long Time to make a Tradition. Therefore these false Doctrines with which *Christ* here charges them, were of old standing among them before he came. And they called it * the Tradition of their Elders, that is, of those before them, and of the Governors of their Church, called generally by the Name of their Elders.

But let us look into their former Times. We find them all involved in the Idolatry of the Golden Calf, even *Aaron* the High-Priest, and whatever can be called their Church, when they thought they had lost *Moses* †, upon his tarrying so long on the Mount. There is not one Exception made of any of the People, who did not come in fully to this Idolatry. And how frequently afterwards did they relapse into this Sin? *Daniel* charges it ‡ upon all *Israel*, as well as upon their *Kings, Princes, &c.* *All the chief of the priests* *.

They persecuted their own Prophets ||, at the Instigation of their Priests. Who likewise persuaded them to ask *Barabbas*, and destroy *Jesus* §? It was their whole Sanhedrim, † the *chief priests and all the council.* And it was upon the same Principle, and their Assu-

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rance

* Mark vii. 5. † Exod. xxxii. 1, &c. ‡ Dan. ix. 11. * 2 Chr. xxxvi. 14. || Jer. xxvi. 8, 11. § Matt. xxvii. 20. † Mark xiv. 53, 55.

rance of the Infallibility of their Church, for, said they, * *the law shall not perish from the priest*. Therefore, *Let us smite Jeremiah, and let us not give heed to any of his words*. Which of the prophets, says St. Stephen †, *have not your Fathers persecuted?* Our Saviour told them ‡, *Your fathers killed the prophets and ye build their sepulchres; and say, if we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them who killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers*. Yet they could not see the Fallibility of their Fathers; nor their own, when they were filling up their Measure, in Persecuting the *Messiah*, as their Fathers had the Prophets. But they still stick to their Infallibility, That the Law could not perish from the Priest. And which is more wonderful, you still stick to their Infallibility, because you cannot otherwise support your own. And you quote the Promises made to them, as securing you from Fallibility! Thus they are your Fathers as well as of the *Jews*, and we may say to you, as *Christ* said to the *Jews*, *Your fathers killed the prophets, &c.* Nay, we may say more to you, That *your Fathers* killed the *Messiah*, and yet you still maintain their Infallibility!

But while *Christ* exposed the Fallibility of the Church, he still supported her Authority, by

* Jer. xviii. 18. † Acts viii 52. ‡ Matt. xxiii. 29, &c.

by owning that the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* sat in *Moses's* Seat.

And this determines the Limits of our Submission to any Authority, *viz.* To observe and do whatsoever they command us (that is lawful) let them be never so wicked, as wicked as these *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, whom in the same Chapter *Christ* calls *Serpents*, a *Generation of Vipers*, and *Children of Hell*. But to beware of their Doctrine, not to think ourselves obliged to give the inward Assent of our Minds, and to believe all that they shall require of us as of Faith. For this is the most desperate Condition any mortal Man can be in. And if our *private Judgment* lead us to this, there is no other Instance in the World wherein it can so fatally deceive us!

The next to this, is the Condition of you *Dissenters*, who instead of observing and doing whatsoever is commanded you, though it be lawful; will do nothing you are bidden; and for that very Reason, because you are bidden; insomuch that what you yourselves own to be lawful, and indifferent, and that you might do it of your own Head; you think it becomes sinful, meerly because enjoined by your lawful Superiors! For then it is an Encroachment upon your Christian Liberty! This is the Spirit of Contradiction, it is Crossness for Crossness Sake! Of which you would soon be sensible if it were in your own Children. If one of them should say to you, I would have done

36 *Of Private Judgment*

what you bid me, but now will not, because you bid me.

Upon the Whole ; I allow the Church to be the Judge of Faith, the only and supreme Judge of it upon Earth. As in all Civil Government there is a last Resort which is supreme and unaccountable to *Man* ; but there is an Appeal to *God*, from whom both derive their Authority. But the Church of *Rome* will not suffer me to appeal from her to *God*, no not in my own Mind. *St. Peter* owned the Authority of the Church of the *Jews*, and called their *Sanhedrim* *, the *Rulers* of the *People*, the *Elders* of *Israel*, and the *Builders* of the *Church* ; but yet he said to them, † *Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye* : He spoke of the *Messiah*, the Corner-stone, whom they had rejected, and therefore he appealed from the Church to *God*, in this Supreme and most Fundamental Point of Faith.

Christ came with an Evidence and Authority then superior to that of the Church. He said, ‖ *I receive not testimony from Man* — *The Father himself hath borne witness of me*. And indeed to shew *Christ* by the Church, would be lighting a Candle to see the Sun.

The Church is the Interpreter of the Scripture, as the Judges are of the Law. And they have Authority so to interpret, and they judge authoritatively. Yet they are but the ordinary

* Acts iv. 8, 11. † Ibid. ver. 19. ‖ John v. 34, 37.

nary Dispensers of the Law, to which an ordinary Interpretation of the Law is necessary. But the ultimate Interpretation of the Law is only in the Legislative Authority, according to the Maxim, *Cujus est condere, ejus & interpretari*, that is, *It belongs to the same Power which enacts to interpret*. For the Makers of the Law best know their own Meaning. Thus the Church is the ordinary Dispenser, and so far the Interpreter of Scripture: But the ultimate Decision is in God, and we may still appeal to him. And must make use of our own *private Judgment* for our understanding it, and governing our Practice accordingly, in the great Points of Faith and Worship.

(XVI.) Let us come to a Test in this Matter. And it is very short. *Christ* says to the People, * *Search the Scriptures, for they are they which testify of me—And how is it, that ye do not discern this time?* (that is, of the Coming of the *Messiah*) † *Yea, and why even of your own selves judge ye not what is right?* The *Vulgat* has it, *Hoc autem tempus quomodo non probatis?* Why do you not examine and prove whether this be the Time or not, by the Signs which the Scriptures have testified of it? As you discern the Weather by the natural Signs which precede; the Comparison our Saviour there uses. || *Ye can discern*

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* John v. 30. † Luke xii. 56, 57. || Matt. xvi. 3.

38 Of Private Judgment

the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times? that is, when the Messiah should come; which are as plain as the other, that ye need not go to anybody to know it. Quid autem & à vobis ipsis non judicatis? You may judge it of your own selves.

In answer to all which, says *Authority*, Nay, But has the Church determined it? * *Have any of the rulers or pharisees believed on him? But this People, who knoweth not the law, are cursed. Are not they cursed who depart from the Church, and will not believe her? who take upon themselves to know the Law, and to interpret it, contrary to the Judgment of the Church! They set up private Judgment against Authority! And I must leave it to every Man's private Judgment to judge of all that I have said.*

For this is the only general Rule by which God will judge all Men. It is a presumptuous Argument to say, that God is obliged to give every Man an outward Guide, when he has left the greatest Part of the World without it. Was *Abraham* given a Guide to all the World, who was known only to a few Neighbours? The Law was given only to the *Jews*, and the *Gentiles* were not to be judged by it. For † *as many as sin without the law, shall be judged without the law.* And not believing the Gospel is a Condemnation to those only to whom it is preached. ‡ *Go ye, and preach — he that*

* John vii. 48.

† Rom. ii. 12.

‡ Mark xvi. 15, 16.

that believeth not—that is, what you *preach*. So that rejecting the Gospel was the Crime, when it was offered with full Evidence. For this was despising the Goodness of God offer'd to us. But for a general Guide to Mankind,* *In the beginning God created man, and left him in the hand of his own council.* He set before him *Life and Death, Blessing and † Cursing*, for him to *chuse*. And God will bless or curse him, according to what he has set before him, whether by Revelation, or by his own natural Reason only. And who is judge of this? None but *God*, who only knows the Sincerity of any Man's Intentions, and what Endeavours he has used towards the right informing of his Judgment. And where there is Use for a Guide, Man has no other Way to determine himself, but by his *private Judgment*.

(XVII.) Now to apply this as to our own immediate Concerns at present. I suppose a Man on his Road to such a Place, and coming where there are three or four different Ways, he knows not which to *chuse*. But he finds there several Guides standing, who all pretend to be appointed Guides of that Road, and offer their Service, with equal Assurance, each saying, that the Way he points is the right, and none other. But the Traveller has a Chart, or Plan, of the Way in his Hand,

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which

* Ecclus. xv. 14.

† Deut. xxx. 19.

which all the Guides allow to be just and right, and would have him walk by it. Only one tells him, he may mistake his Plan, therefore desires he would give it up to him ; and moreover, that he should be blind-folded, because otherwise he might be disputing the Way, which would retard their Journey ; and besides imply'd a Distrust of his Guide. But another Guide tells him he should keep his Plan in his Hand, and he would give him leave to examine every Step he led him by the Plan, and then his own Eyes should be Judge whether he led him right or not ? And he would not desire it should be left in his Power to lead him over a Precipice with his Eyes shut.

The Holy Scriptures are the Plan, and the Church of *Rome* takes them from the People, (lest they dispute about it) and requires them to trust *Absolutely* and *Blindly* to her Guidance.

The Church of *England* shews her Commission to be a Guide upon this Road to Heaven, derived, by Succession, from the Apostles, with a competent, though not an infallible, Authority.

The *Dissenters* have no Commission nor Succession to shew ; they have thrust themselves as Guides upon this Road, of their own Heads, not above 150 Years ago, in utter Contempt and Opposition to all the Guides of God's Appointment, from the Days of the Apostles. And they have no Authority at all, either

either to preach the *Word*, or to sign and seal the Covenant which *God* has made with Man, in the Holy Sacraments of his Institution, nor to bless in his Name. This Honour they have taken to themselves, which the Apostle says, * *No man can take to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.*

And now, since *God* has appointed his Guides to lead us with our Eyes open, and not to take from us the Use of our *private Judgment*; that is, of our Understanding, without which we could not be Men; Since this is all the Security of which we are capable in this frail State; and, to strain it higher, would be to lose it all; Let us not be taken with that presumptuous Sophistry of Infallibility, which hardened the *Jews* against their *Messiah*; unanswerable by the Church of *Rome*, and hides Repentance from her Eyes!

I have given before a Demonstration of the Truth of the Holy Scriptures, and of Christianity, without touching upon the Authority of the Church (only they come in for their Share of the Evidence, as they are Part of Mankind) to shew that our Faith stands not upon the precarious Foot of the Authority of any Church, but upon such Evidence as is agreeable to the common Sense of Mankind, and which they cannot deny, without throwing off all the Certainty they can have in any Facts whatsoever that have been done in the World. But if you argue from the Authority of the Church,

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* Heb. v. 4.

42 *Of Private Judgment*

you rivet every one in his own Way ; for you must suppose that another has as good an Opinion of his Church, as you have of yours. And the *Jew* has moreover the same Promises for his Church, which the Church of *Rome* alleges for her Infallibility and Perpetuity.

And the *Jewish* Church was uncontestably in Possession of all these Promises, for many Ages together, because she was the true and only Church of *God* upon the Face of the Earth, from *Moses* to *Christ*.

Therefore *Christianity* must have such a Foundation to stand upon, as will not give equal (and greater) Advantage to *Judaism* ; else *Christianity* cannot be the Truth, and her Reformation was unjust against the Church in Possession ; and we ought to return to her, who was undoubtedly the Mother-Church, by the Confession of all the Christians themselves. And she still complains, and asks the Question, who was or ought to be Judge, 'betwixt her and her rebellious Sons, who broke off from her, and set up a new and opposite Communion against her, though they were * a great Company of her Priests, and Myriads of her People ? Yet they were all misled, if our Faith stands upon Church-Authority.

This is a hard Saying to many. And I will retract it, when any one shall have the Charity to shew me my Error.

But I have not said this, till I had first established the Truth of Christianity upon another Foun-

* Acts vi. 7. xxi. 20.

Foundation, to which neither *Jew* nor *Gentile* can have any Pretence. I have shewed the *Way to Christ* by his own Glory, to which, as nothing can add, so no other Truth can imitate, nor Authority give Sanction to it, except that only of his *Father*, for * *He receiveth not honour from men.*

If any answer me, I desire him first to join with me in this Prayer, that it would please *God* to strengthen those that are in the Truth, and convince those that are in Error. Towards which I have cast in my Mite.

Quod faustum faxit Deus.

* John v. 41.

F I N I S.



THE CONTENTS.

- I. *THE Importance of the Subject.* 3
- II. *The evil Consequences of private Judgment.* 4
- III. *The Consequences of submitting absolutely to Authority.* 5
- These compared together.* 7
1. *In the Gentiles.* *ibid.*
2. *In the Jews.* 8
- IV. *The Stumbling-Block of the Jews was the Authority of the Church. And the Promises made to Her.* *ibid.*
- Both now taken up by the Church of Rome.* 9
- V. *The Advantage in Both is to the Jews.* 13
- VI. *The Promises in the New Testament not made to the Church of Rome.* 14
- VII. *She is not the Mother Church.* 15
- Tell it to the Church, explained. And Deut. xvii.* 16
- VIII. *No Judge of Faith but God.* 17
- Exemplified in the several Articles of the Creed.* *ibid.*
- If the Church were Judge of Faith, it would set her above God.* 18
- IX. *We receive the Faith, not from the Authority, but the Testimony of the Church.* *ibid.*
- X. *Who shall be Judge? To be asked only in Matters of lesser Concern, not in the Faith.* 20
- No such Authority in the Apostles or Angels of Heaven.* 21
- XI. *Why Christ came in Opposition to the Church, and all Human Authority.* 21
- XII. *The Canon of Holy Scripture settled by the Testimony, not the Authority of the Church.* 23

Wherein

The CONTENTS.

<p><i>Wherein of the Apocrypha.</i> 24</p> <p>XIII. <i>The great Mistake in understanding the Promises of God made to his Church, as if without any implied Condition on her Part.</i> 26</p> <p><i>Whence the furious Zeal of the Jews for their Peculium. And of Rome with less Pretence.</i> 27</p> <p>XIV. <i>The Church has Authority even in Matters of Faith.</i> 28</p>	<p>XV. <i>The Extent of her Authority. And Fallibility of the Jewish Church.</i> 31</p> <p>XVI. <i>A short Test to determine the Matter. God is not Obliged to give Men an Infallible Guide, because not given to the greatest Part of Mankind.</i> 37</p> <p>XVII. <i>Application of the Whole, as to the Pretensions for the several Churches now amongst us.</i> 39</p>
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Trinitarian L. 41. 21. 21.

Abolitionist. Infinite perfection. L. 60. 21.

Reformed religion - common view. 47

Ship above. L. 59

Analogy of the Trinity. 161. 2

God's power. infinite perfection. 63.

Perfection in God. infinite perfection. L. 64

Perfection in God. L. 64

Trinitarian L. 41. 21. 21.
Trinitarian L. 41. 21. 21.
Trinitarian L. 41. 21. 21.

11/9